INNOVATION
the MAZE AGENCY®
11
'Twas The Crime Before Christmas.

INNOVATION™

When Lightning Struck The Final Time

C.C. Beck is gone. The youngest of you readers probably don't even know what that *means*. But Charles Clarence (*not* Crusty Curmudgeon, though that sometimes fit) Beck was responsible not only for co-creating the original Captain Marvel with Bill Parker, but also for maintaining an attitude that we shouldn't lose sight of the fact that comics should be entertaining and enjoyable, instead of always "dreary and deadly serious."

Mr. Beck – along with Ray Bradbury and, in a different way, Al Williamson – was the reason I decided to break into comics. There I was, in high school, having read Steranko's *History of Comics* and steeped in the legends and background. I'd been on pins and needles awaiting the return of Captain Marvel ("DC's Christmas present to you!" the ads proclaimed) – and when he returned, he was drawn once again by C.C. Beck.

Yet after reading seven issues, I was left wondering, "Is this all there is? Is there nothing more?" Then Mr. Beck resigned, returning to DC undrawn the stories "The Incredible Cape Man" and "Invasion of the Salad Men." He'd viewed only E. Nelson Bridwell's "What's In A Name? Doomsday!" story from *Shazam #7* to be worthy of that Big Red Cheese, and nothing DC'd provided was quite up to par with the best of Otto Binder, or Rod Reed, or Bill Woolfolk.

So, in my youth, I thought the unthinkable. I wrote a plot and script for the story, "Captain Marvel For A Day." And, in my naivete, I sent it to Mr. Beck – cold.

He wrote back. "Your story is very good -- too good for DC. If you could write some really rotten stories, you could replace [the current writers]...."

So I sent others to him: "Hero In The Sky," "Mr. Tawny's Formula Farce" (this one with Scott Rockwell), and more. And got replies, suggestions, advice. I found that Mr. Beck had hopes, at one point, of seeing DC approaching the likes of Bill Woolfolk and a select group of Captain Marvel fans for stories, and Mr. Beck hoped to resurrect a studio to handle the art. "...Even though they're only paying about $65 a page," he wrote, "which is about the same as I got back in the early 1950s."

As part of that, John Clark, and Don Newton, and Mr. Beck had all submitted outlines for "good stories," and only one had even been approved in the plot stage – "The Seven Deadly Enemies of Man," a 20-page story Mr. Beck was writing, to be featured in *Shazam!* #14. But it was re-written at DC -- so Mr. Beck withdrew the story. "Wendell Crowley is dead," he typed to me, "and there'll never be another editor as good as he was."

He had me look at the *Whiz Comics* B&W trade paperback collection that Alan Light released, so I could see first-hand the balance between humor and seriousness. Beck's own story, "The Temple of Itsalottahui," was part of that *Whiz #7 - 28* run. The stories DC often reprinted were the sillier ones, almost as if to justify the new stories they were producing.

Individually, I submitted to DC the stories Mr. Beck approved. If they would buy one of them, he wrote me, then he'd return to draw it. For me, it was an honor, and a privilege. And an inspiration.

He felt quite sure, though, that his approving the story was more a kiss of death "in the offices" than a benefit.

Mr. Beck was right.

When I began raising a family, I changed direction in life, moved a couple of times, and lost track. I'd heard second-hand that he'd had a stroke, and it pained me to consider that C.C. Beck might not be able to draw anymore. But I saw a couple of new sketches in print, and realized such wasn't quite the case. And his thoughts – exaggerated a bit, for effect – occasionally appeared in a "Crusty Curmudgeon" feature in *The Comics Journal*, and as always they were fun to read. And the big, fancy, color $130 Captain Marvel vs Mr. Mind saga is out, and I had little doubt that it would allow the kidhood thrill to return.

So here I am, writing and editing at Innovation, and one of the more "comic" projects I'm publishing is ***MANGLE TANGLE TALES***. I'd found a current Florida address and was preparing a nice package. "Mr. Beck will like this," I thought. I wonder what he would've thought of ***THE MAZE AGENCY***.

But now, package not yet mailed, Mr. Beck is dead. The character he co-created and knew better than did anyone else on the planet lives on, hardly the same as when we knew him, but still a testament to Mr. Beck – by way of Soloman, Hercules, Atlas, Zeus, Achilles, Mercury...and the fans who will remember both Mr. Beck and that Big Red Cheese forever in our hearts.

-- David Campiti
December, 1989

THE MAZE AGENCY®
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MICHELE WOLFMAN Colorist	**DAVID CAMPITI** Editor

...BUT SINCE WHEN DO WE NEED ANY?
THAT'S A GREAT TREE, BABE--I THINK IT'S EVEN BIGGER THAN THE ONE AT YOUR PLACE.
WELL, I LIKE A REAL TREE. I ALWAYS HAVE EVER SINCE I WAS A LITTLE GIRL.
YOU LOOK LIKE YOU'RE ALL SET TO GO.
YEP. NO MORE TRUE-CRIME ARTICLES TILL NEXT YEAR. FAMILY AND FRIENDS AWAIT BACK IN OHIO. MY PLANE TAKES OFF IN AN HOUR...
...BUT FIRST...
NO, YOU.
OPEN YOURS FIRST.
JEN, THIS IS GREAT! IT'S MECHANICAL, TOO! WHEN THEY DROP THE BOMB, I WON'T HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT BATTERIES!
I KNEW IT WAS FOR YOU THE MOMENT I SAW IT. ALL THOSE GEARS WHIRRING AROUND REMIND ME OF YOUR MIND.
ONLY MY MIND?
WHY DON'T I JUST OPEN THIS...?
2

OH, GABE, THIS IS LOVELY. YOU REMEMBERED THE SAPPHIRE IS MY BIRTHSTONE..
I SURE DID..
LET ME HELP YOU PUT IT ON..
DON'T START ANYTHING YOU CAN'T FINISH, ACE.
"DID YOU READ THE TAG?"
FOR JENNIFER, ALL MY LOVE, Gabe
"ALL MY LOVE.."
YOU KNOW HOW I FEEL ABOUT YOU, JEN.
I KNOW, YES. AND I KNOW WHAT YOU WANT TO HEAR ME SAY. BUT I CAN'T--NOT YET.
SURE.
NO HURRY.
REALLY.
WELL, I'D BETTER BE GOING.
GABE, WHY DON'T WE SPEND CHRISTMAS TOGETHER? AFTER THE PARTY TONIGHT, WE COULD...
3

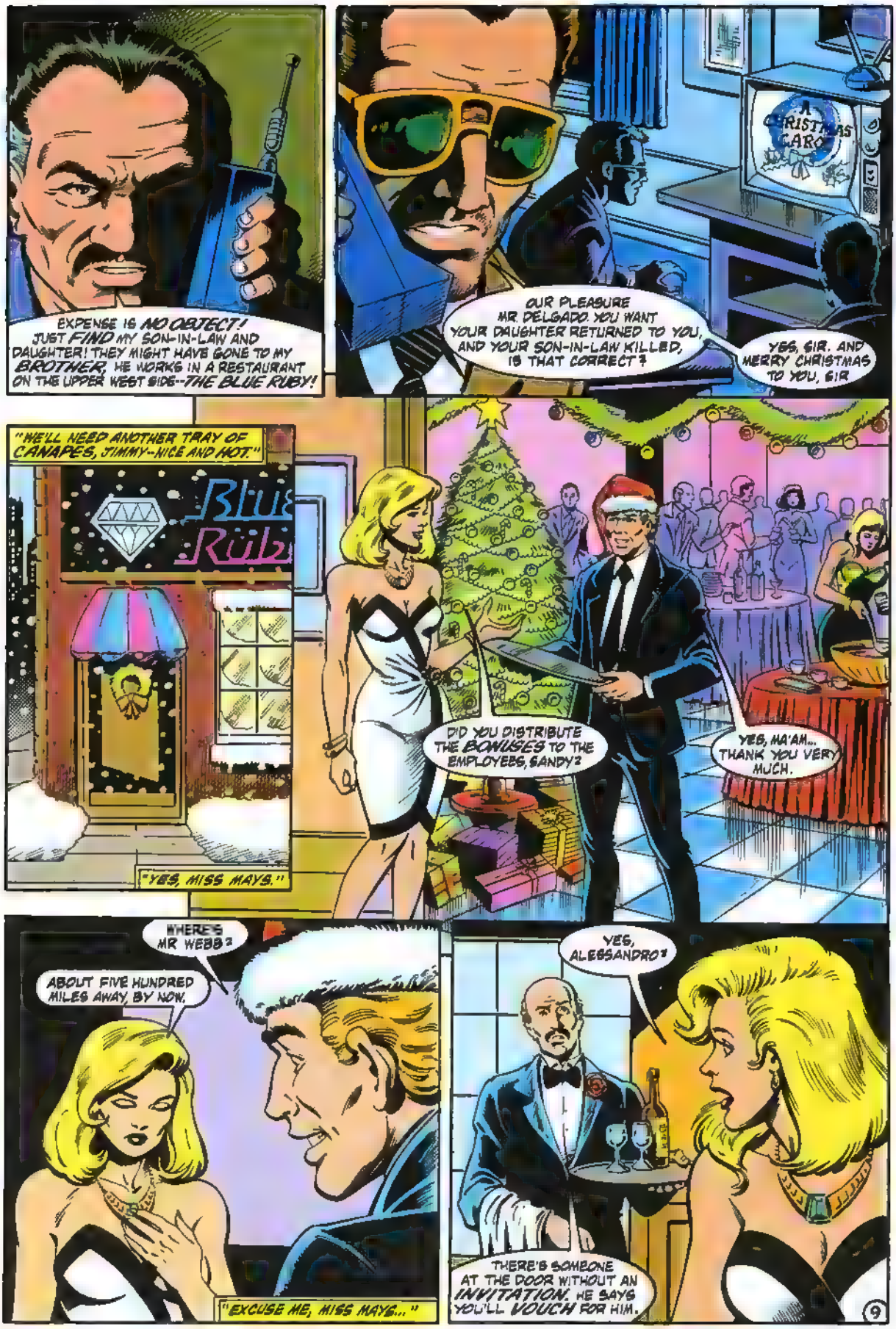
PEOPLE ARE EXPECTING ME, JEN.
ALL RIGHT... MERRY CHRISTMAS.
YOU, TOO. BYE.
"1990 WILL BE A GOOD YEAR FOR THE DELGADO FAMILY--ALL BUT ONE OF US."
YOU KNOW WHO IN THE ORGANIZATION HAS BEEN TALKING TO THE POLICE, DAD?
THE FISH STINKS FROM THE HEAD, TONY-- THE JUDAS SITS AT THIS TABLE!
JOHN, DON'T MAKE SUCH JOKES AT CHRISTMAS...!
I DON'T JOKE ABOUT THIS, LUCIA.
WHO IS IT, MR. DEL--DAD?
DON'T SAY DADDY! I DON'T WANT TO KNOW!
4

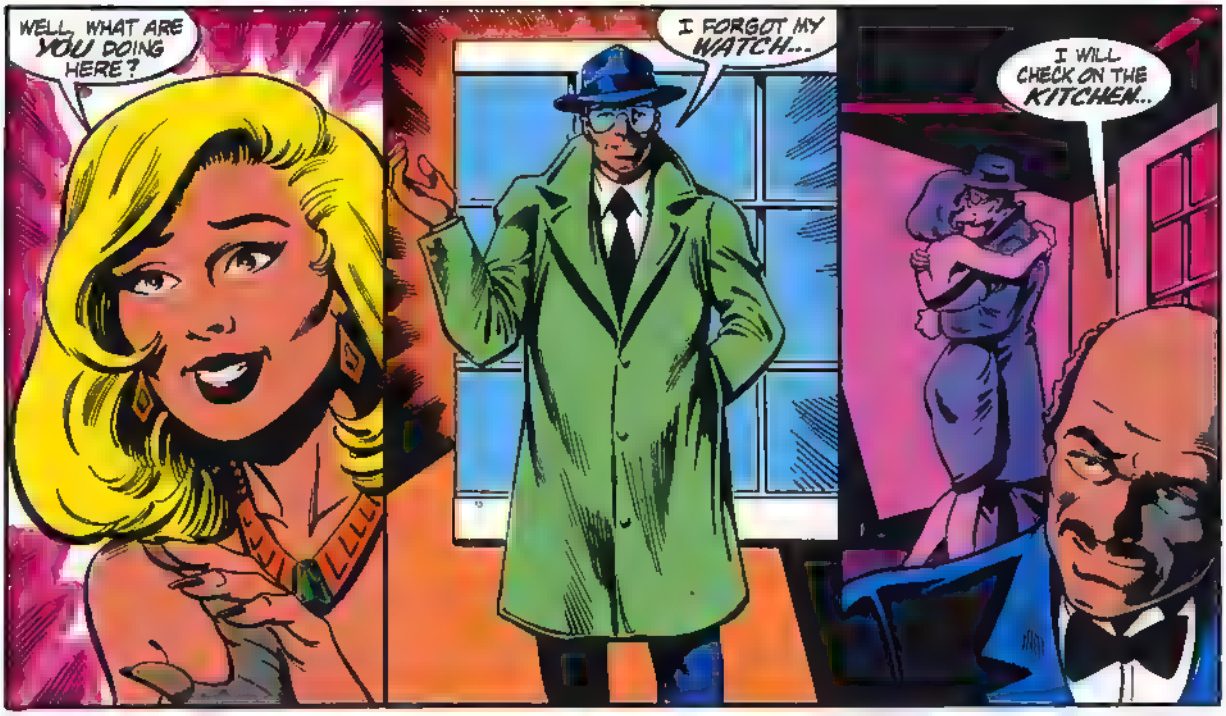
I DOUBT HE EVEN KNOWS, ROSA! IF HE DID, HE WOULD HAVE TOLD MY LAWRENCE, AND LAWRENCE WOULD HAVE TOLD--
I DON'T TELL YOU EVERYTHING, CLARA. JOHN KNOWS.
THIS IS A REAL BUMMER TO LAY ON US, UNCLE JOHN!
ROSA, WHAT'S WRONG--?
EXCUSE ME...
MAYBE THE BABY'S KICKING AGAIN. EXCUSE ME...
JOHN, WHY DO YOU DO THIS? ON CHRISTMAS EVE...?
THE FAMILY IS ALL, LUCIA! FIRST THERE WAS MY BROTHER LAWRENCE AND ME, THEN YOU. MY OTHER BROTHER, ALESSANDRO, IS DEAD IN MY EYES.
WE ARE ALL EACH OF US HAS. NOTHING CAN BE PERMITTED TO ENDANGER THAT!
ROSA, ARE YOU--?
I'M FINE, GARY... BUT I WANTED TO GET YOU AWAY FROM THERE!
ME--? WHY?
SHHH. YOU CAN'T FOOL ME, GARY. YOU'RE THE INFORMER PAPA'S AFTER.

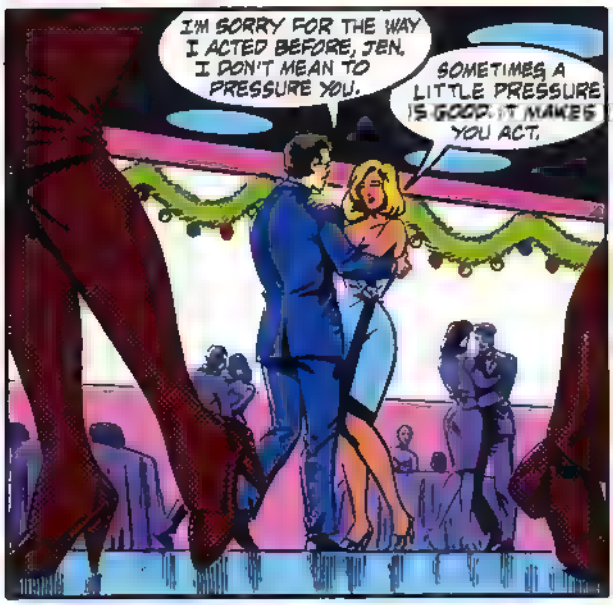
ME? THAT'S RIDICULOUS! I AM NOT--
HOW DID YOU KNOW?
YOU'RE MY HUSBAND, GARY CRANDALL. I'M NOT SAYING I APPROVE, BUT YOU'RE STILL MY HUSBAND...
...AND I WANT MY BABY TO HAVE A WHOLE FAMILY... EVEN IF WE HAVE TO MOVE AWAY, CHANGE OUR NAMES-- WHATEVER IT TAKES.
I NEVER INTENDED FOR YOU TO GET HURT BY THIS, ROSA, PLEASE BELIEVE ME.
ALWAYS.
WE'D BETTER GO.
I DON'T WANT YOU WITH ME, HONEY. YOUR FATHER WON'T HURT YOU.
AND THAT'S WHY I SHOULD BE WITH YOU.
OKAY... IF YOU THINK IT'S SAFE.
I THINK SO. JUNIOR'S BEEN PRETTY QUIET TODAY. ARE YOU SURE YOU DON'T MIND LUGGING A BLIMP LIKE ME AROUND?
YOU'RE BEAUTIFUL.

LAWRENCE, IS YOUR HEADACHE ANY BETTER? WE'RE ALMOST READY TO OPEN PRESENTS.
EEEEEEEEK
AMBULANCE
RRRRRRRRRRRRRRRR
LARRY ALWAYS HAS A FIGHTER! YOU'D BETTER KEEP HIM ALIVE, DR. MORRIS!
MANHATTAN GENERAL EMERGENCY
"MR. DELGADO, WE DO NOT PERMIT GUARDS IN OUR HOSPITAL WALLS...!"
I THINK WE CAN BEND THE RULES, CAN'T WE, DOCTOR? ESPECIALLY FOR A MAN WHO'S ABOUT TO DONATE SEVERAL HUNDRED THOUSAND DOLLARS TO YOUR ESTABLISHMENT?
245
ER... WELL... THAT IS... I SUPPOSE HE COULD STAY INSIDE THE ROOM...
7

HOW IS HE, DOCTOR?
HE MADE IT THROUGH THE OPERATION, MR. DELGADO. THAT'S A START.
"MR. DELGADO?"
SIR, I'M LIEUTENANT BLISS, THIS IS SERGENT SIMONS. WE'RE WITH HOMICIDE.
THERE HAS BEEN NO HOMICIDE HERE, LIEUTENANT. THIS WAS MERELY AN UNFORTUNATE ACCIDENT.
THE HOSPITAL IS REQUIRED TO NOTIFY THE POLICE ANYTIME A GUNSHOT WOUND IS TREATED, SIR. DO YOU CALL SIX BULLETS AT POINT-BLANK RANGE AN ACCIDENT?
RADIOLOGY
YES. AND IF YOU WANT ANYTHING MORE, YOU CAN TALK TO MY LAWYER, MR. PARKHOUSE.
I THOUGHT YOUR LAWYER WAS YOUR SON-IN-LAW, GARY CRANDELL?
I'VE SAID ALL I'M GOING TO SAY, LIEUTENANT.
NO SMOKING IN HERE, SIMONS.
NO SM
SORRY, LOOT.
TRY A PIECE OF BUBBLE GUM, INSTEAD.
NO S
WHAT DO I LOOK LIKE, BAZOOKA JOE? THAT STUFF IS FOR KIDS.
NO S
...MA'AM.
8

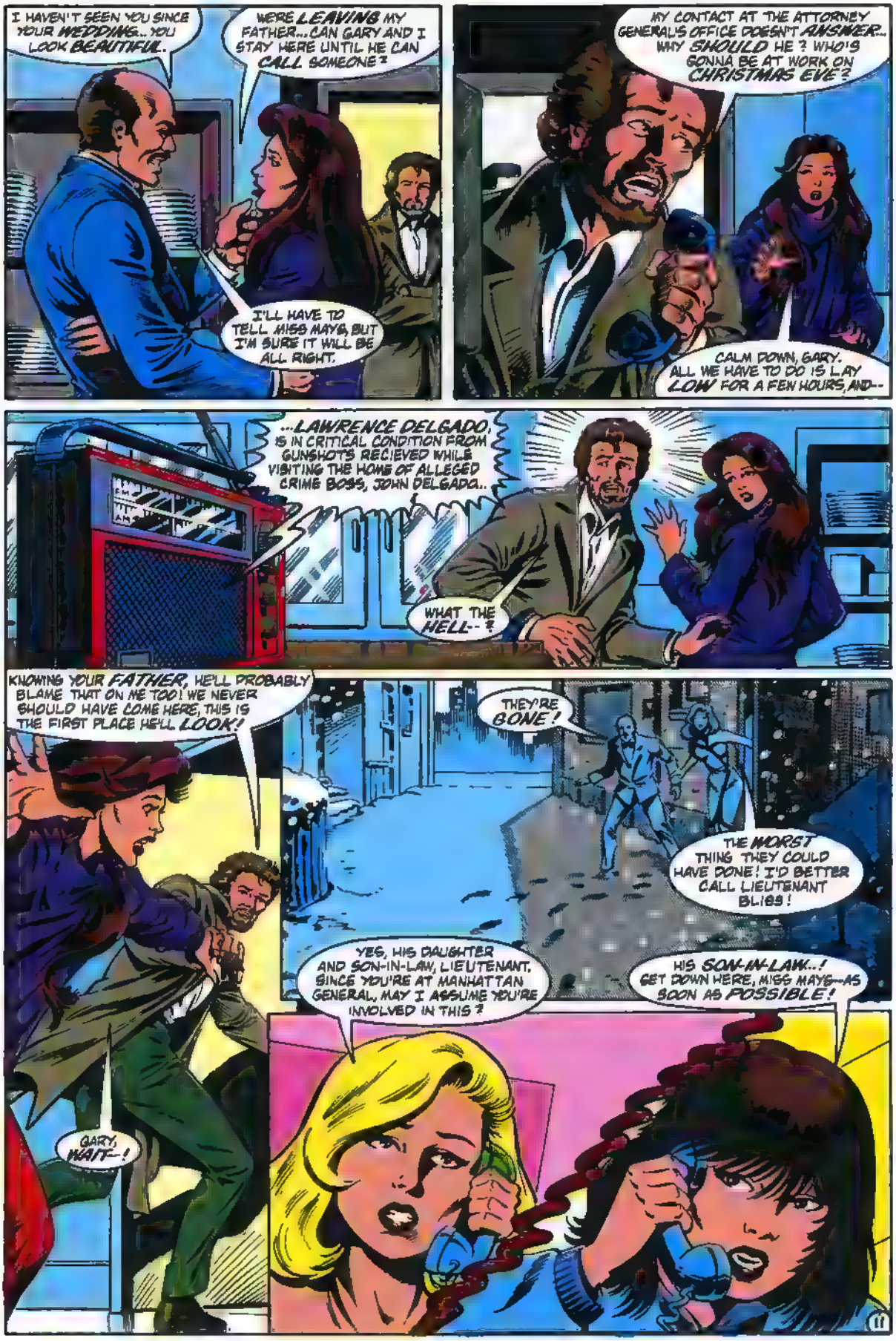

EXPENSE IS NO OBJECT! JUST FIND MY SON-IN-LAW AND DAUGHTER! THEY MIGHT HAVE GONE TO MY BROTHER, HE WORKS IN A RESTAURANT ON THE UPPER WEST SIDE--THE BLUE RUBY!
A CHRISTMAS CAROL
OUR PLEASURE MR DELGADO. YOU WANT YOUR DAUGHTER RETURNED TO YOU, AND YOUR SON-IN-LAW KILLED, IS THAT CORRECT?
YES, SIR. AND MERRY CHRISTMAS TO YOU, SIR
"HE'LL NEED ANOTHER TRAY OF CANAPES, JIMMY--NICE AND HOT."
BLUE RUBY
"YES, MISS MAYS."
DID YOU DISTRIBUTE THE BONUSES TO THE EMPLOYEES, SANDY?
YES, MA'AM... THANK YOU VERY MUCH.
WHERE'S MR WEBB?
ABOUT FIVE HUNDRED MILES AWAY, BY NOW.
"EXCUSE ME, MISS MAYS..."
YES, ALESSANDRO?
THERE'S SOMEONE AT THE DOOR WITHOUT AN INVITATION. HE SAYS YOU'LL VOUCH FOR HIM.
9

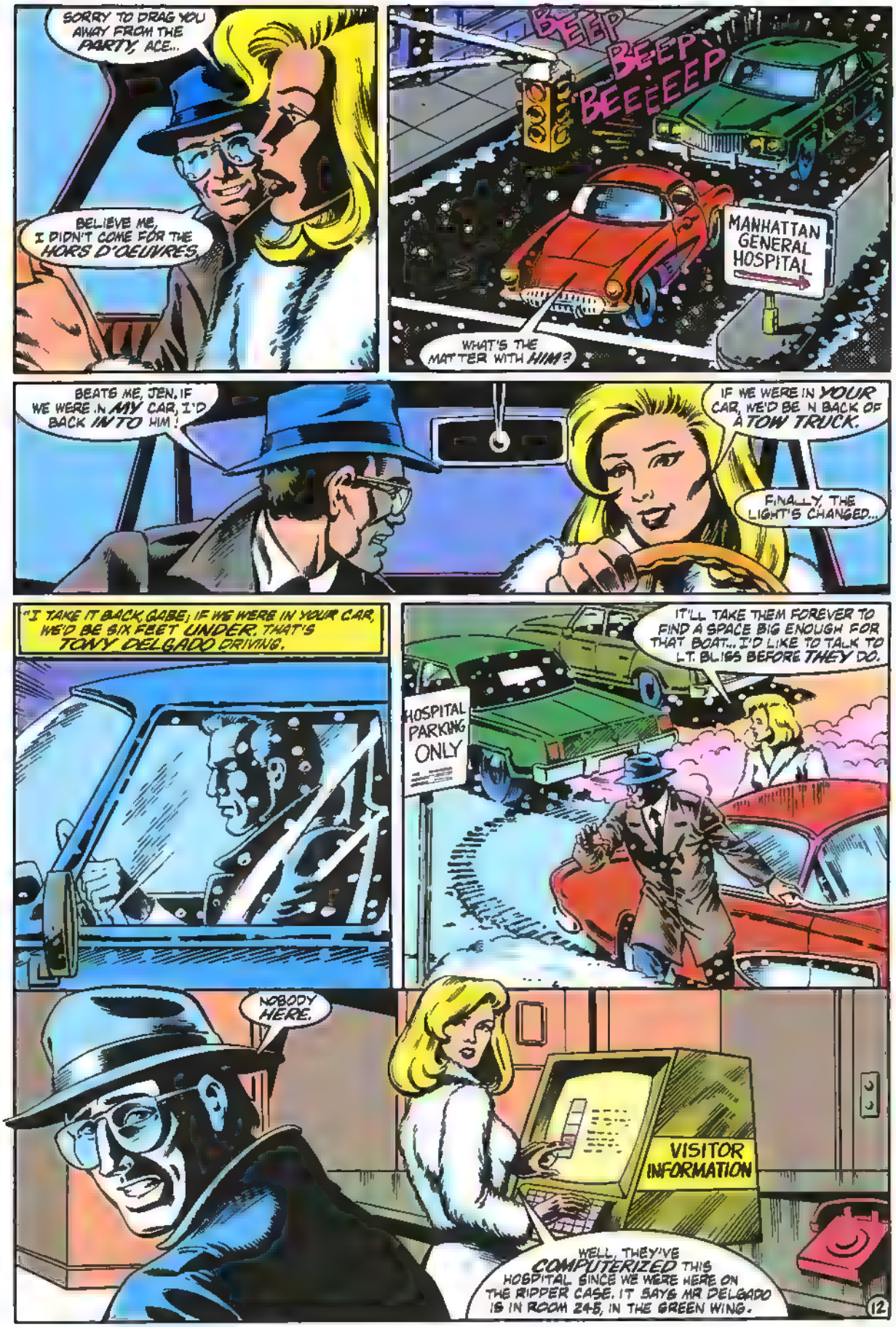

WELL, WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?
I FORGOT MY WATCH...
I WILL CHECK ON THE KITCHEN..


I'M SORRY FOR THE WAY I ACTED BEFORE, JEN. I DON'T MEAN TO PRESSURE YOU.
SOMETIMES A LITTLE PRESSURE IS GOOD. IT MAKES YOU ACT.

BELIEVE ME, THE LAST THING I'D WANT TO DO WOULD BE TO DRIVE YOU AWAY.
BELIEVE ME, THAT'S THE LAST THING YOU COULD DO, MISTER.

ALESSANDRO-- VISITORS.
UNCLE ALESSANDRO!
ROSA?


I HAVEN'T SEEN YOU SINCE YOUR WEDDING... YOU LOOK BEAUTIFUL.
WE'RE LEAVING MY FATHER... CAN GARY AND I STAY HERE UNTIL HE CAN CALL SOMEONE?
I'LL HAVE TO TELL MISS MAYS, BUT I'M SURE IT WILL BE ALL RIGHT.
MY CONTACT AT THE ATTORNEY GENERAL'S OFFICE DOESN'T ANSWER... WHY SHOULD HE? WHO'S GONNA BE AT WORK ON CHRISTMAS EVE?
CALM DOWN, GARY. ALL WE HAVE TO DO IS LAY LOW FOR A FEW HOURS, AND--
...LAWRENCE DELGADO, IS IN CRITICAL CONDITION FROM GUNSHOTS RECIEVED WHILE VISITING THE HOME OF ALLEGED CRIME BOSS, JOHN DELGADO..
WHAT THE HELL--?
KNOWING YOUR FATHER, HE'LL PROBABLY BLAME THAT ON ME TOO! WE NEVER SHOULD HAVE COME HERE, THIS IS THE FIRST PLACE HE'LL LOOK!
GARY, WAIT--!
THEY'RE GONE!
THE WORST THING THEY COULD HAVE DONE! I'D BETTER CALL LIEUTENANT BLISS!
YES, HIS DAUGHTER AND SON-IN-LAW, LIEUTENANT. SINCE YOU'RE AT MANHATTAN GENERAL, MAY I ASSUME YOU'RE INVOLVED IN THIS?
HIS SON-IN-LAW..! GET DOWN HERE, MISS MAYS--AS SOON AS POSSIBLE!


SORRY TO DRAG YOU AWAY FROM THE PARTY, ACE...
BELIEVE ME, I DIDN'T COME FOR THE HORS D'OEUVRES.
BEEP BEEP BEEEEEP
MANHATTAN GENERAL HOSPITAL
WHAT'S THE MATTER WITH HIM?
BEATS ME, JEN. IF WE WERE IN MY CAR, I'D BACK INTO HIM!
IF WE WERE IN YOUR CAR, WE'D BE IN BACK OF A TOW TRUCK.
FINALLY, THE LIGHT'S CHANGED...
"I TAKE IT BACK, GABE; IF WE WERE IN YOUR CAR, WE'D BE SIX FEET UNDER. THAT'S TONY DELGADO DRIVING.
HOSPITAL PARKING ONLY
IT'LL TAKE THEM FOREVER TO FIND A SPACE BIG ENOUGH FOR THAT BOAT... I'D LIKE TO TALK TO LT. BLISS BEFORE THEY DO.
NOBODY HERE.
VISITOR INFORMATION
WELL, THEY'VE COMPUTERIZED THIS HOSPITAL SINCE WE WERE HERE ON THE RIPPER CASE. IT SAYS MR DELGADO IS IN ROOM 245, IN THE GREEN WING.
12

HOW DO WE GET TO THE GREEN WING?
WE FOLLOW THE GREEN LINE, SHERLOCK
I KNEW THAT.
HOW DID YOU TWO FIND THIS ROOM?
MR DELGADO IS LISTED IN THE HOSPITAL DIRECTORY, LIEUTENANT.
WHAT?
THE HOSPITAL COMPUTER MUST HAVE REGISTERED HIM AUTOMATICALLY.
COMPUTERS! I'D BETTER GET HIM UNREGISTERED BEFORE-
EEEEK
STAY HERE! NO ONE GETS IN THIS DOOR BUT ME, UNDERSTAND?
YES, SIR.
POLICE. WHAT HAPPENED HERE, MA'AM?
THERE'S BEEN SHOOTING... HERE IN THE RED WING...
13

YOU FOUND THE ROOM LIKE THIS?
YES.. BUT IT WAS DARKER.. IT WASN'T LIKE THIS A FEW MINUTES AGO.
45
WHAT WAS THE PROBLEM, LIEUTENANT?
I'M NOT SURE, MISS MAYS...YOU TELL ME WHY SOMEONE WOULD WANT TO SHOOT UP A VACANT ROOM!
245
EVERYONE OKAY? I THOUGHT IT MIGHT'VE BEEN A DIVERSION SO THAT PUNK SON-IN-LAW OF MINE COULD TAKE ANOTHER SHOT AT LAWRENCE...
NO ONE EVEN TRIED TO ENTER THE ROOM, SIR.
THE LAB LOOKED AT THE BULLETS FIRED INTO THE BED, LOOT--SAME GUN AS THE ONE THAT SHOT DELBADO.
SILENCED, PROBABLY...I JUST WISH I KNEW WHAT HE'S TRYING TO ACCOMPLISH BY SHOOTING INTO A DARKENED ROOM.
I CAN'T HELP BUT THINK GARY CRANDELL IS THE KEY TO ALL THIS.
WE'VE PUT OUT AN A.P.B. ON HIM, BUT--
245
47
OVER HERE...
JOHN! =SNIF= HOW IS HE?
HE'LL PULL THROUGH, CLARA--HE'S A FIGHTER.
CAN WE SEE HIM?
14

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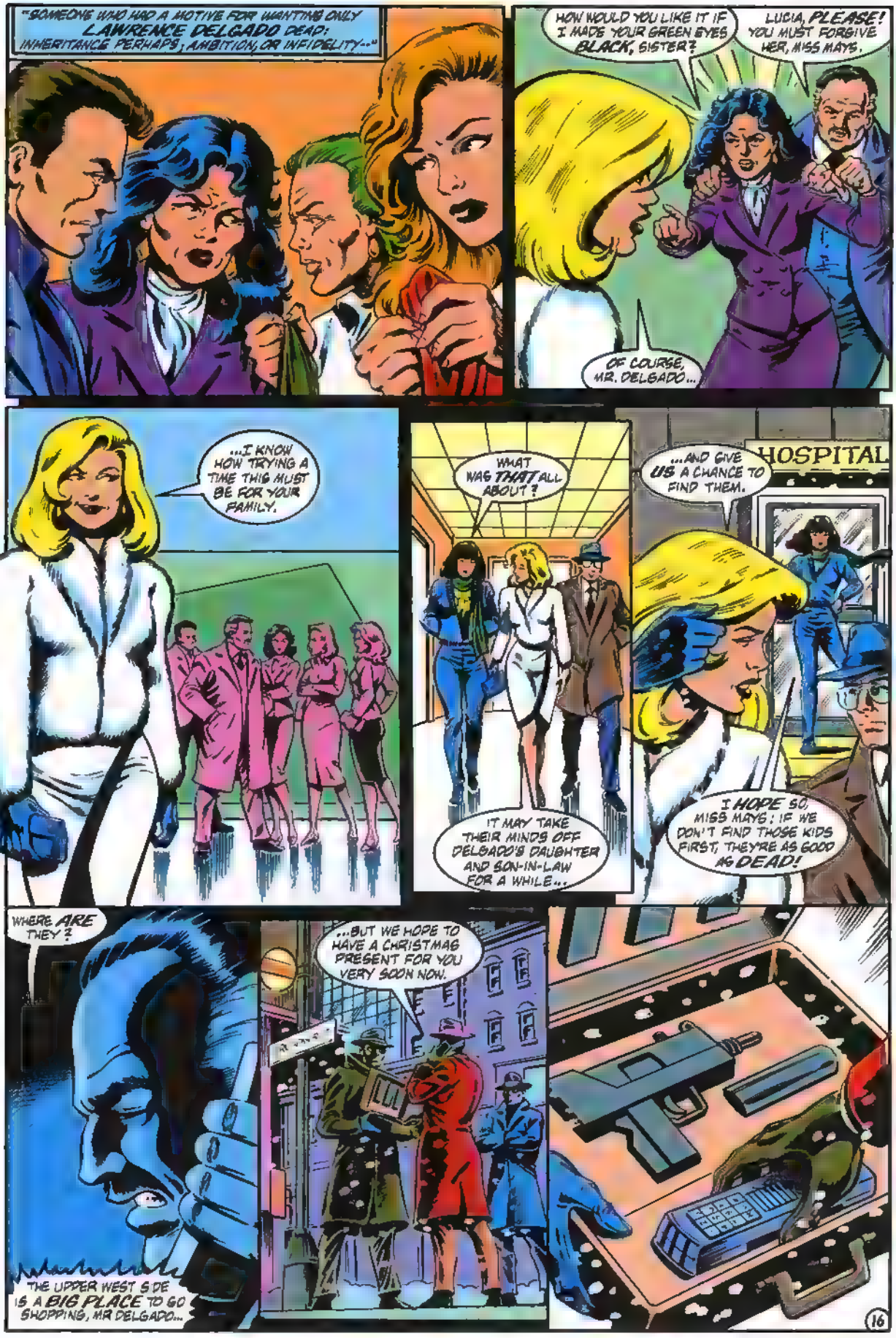
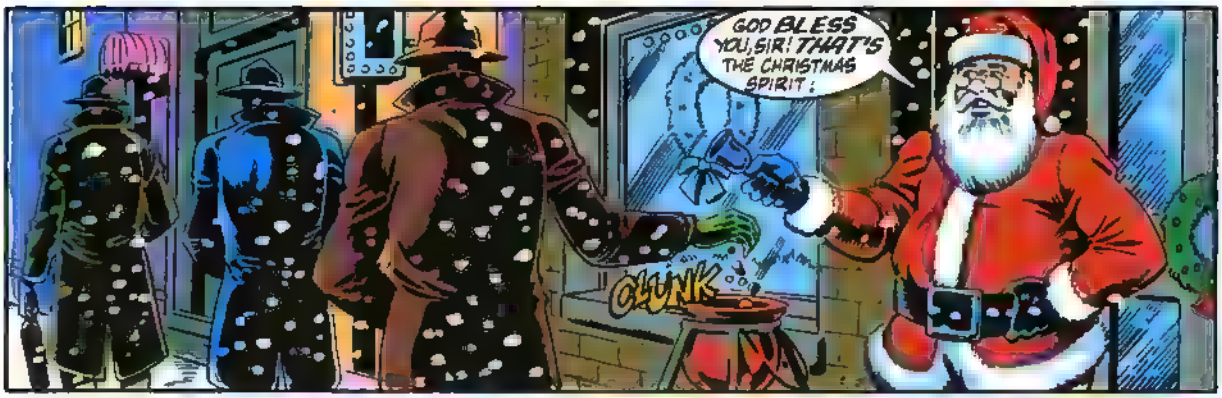
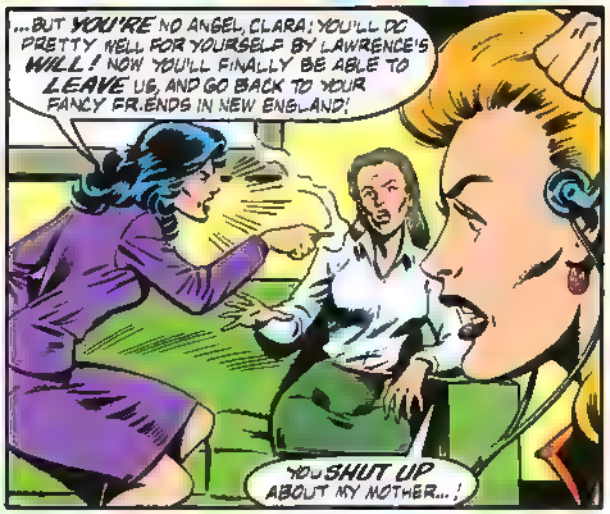
HERE YOU ALL ARE! THAT CROWD IN THE ENTRANCE ROOM WAS JUST HORRID!
"I IMAGINE YOU ALL GOT SEPORATED, IS THAT RIGHT, MRS. DELGADO?"
AS A MATTER OF FACT, YES... BUT WHAT BUSINESS IS THAT OF YOURS, MISS--?
JENNIFER MAYS. I'M A PRIVATE DETECTIVE.
I ALREADY HAVE SEVERAL DETECTIVES ON RETAINER, MISS MAYS.
THE MAZE AGENCY IS TOO BUSY RIGHT NOW TO TAKE ON ANY MORE CLIENTS, MR. DELGADO. I'M SIMPLY WONDERING IF YOU'VE THOUGHT THIS WHOLE THING THROUGH.
WHAT DO YOU MEAN?
"YOU SEEM TO THINK YOUR SON-IN-LAW IS RESPONSIBLE FOR TRYING TO KILL YOUR BROTHER."
"HE IS. HE KNEW LAWRENCE COULD FINGER HIM AS THE INFORMER."
I DON'T THINK ANYONE COULD "FINGER" THE INFORMER MR DELGADO! I THINK THAT WAS A BLUFF ON YOUR PART TO FRIGHTEN THE INFORMER OUT!
YOU'RE WRONG, LADY! LAWRENCE AND I KNEW CRANDELL WAS THE INFORMER! THAT'S WHY CRANDELL TRIED TO KILL LAWRENCE!
F THAT'S THE CASE, THEN WHY DIDN'T GARY CRANDELL TRY TO KILL YOU, AS WELL?
I THINK SOMEONE IS TRYING TO MAKE YOUR SON-IN-LAW TAKE THE BLAME FOR SHOOTING YOUR BROTHER..
15

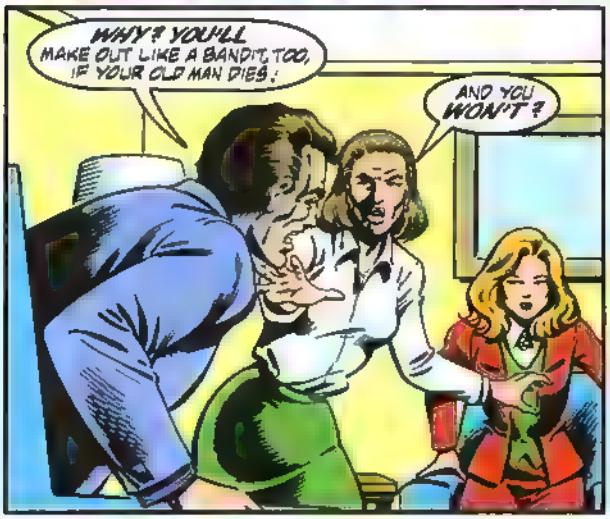

"SOMEONE WHO HAD A MOTIVE FOR WANTING ONLY LAWRENCE DELGADO DEAD: INHERITANCE PERHAPS, AMBITION, OR INFIDELITY..."
HOW WOULD YOU LIKE IT IF I MADE YOUR GREEN EYES BLACK, SISTER?
LUCIA, PLEASE! YOU MUST FORGIVE HER, MISS MAYS.
OF COURSE, MR. DELGADO...
...I KNOW HOW TRYING A TIME THIS MUST BE FOR YOUR FAMILY.
WHAT WAS THAT ALL ABOUT?
IT MAY TAKE THEIR MINDS OFF DELGADO'S DAUGHTER AND SON-IN-LAW FOR A WHILE...
HOSPITAL
...AND GIVE US A CHANCE TO FIND THEM.
I HOPE SO, MISS MAYS; IF WE DON'T FIND THOSE KIDS FIRST, THEY'RE AS GOOD AS DEAD!
WHERE ARE THEY?
...BUT WE HOPE TO HAVE A CHRISTMAS PRESENT FOR YOU VERY SOON NOW.
THE UPPER WEST SIDE IS A BIG PLACE TO GO SHOPPING, MR DELGADO...


GOD BLESS YOU, SIR! THAT'S THE CHRISTMAS SPIRIT!
CLUNK

THE NERVE OF THAT WOMAN, SAYING INFIDELITY MIGHT BE A MOTIVE FOR ONE OF US TO SHOOT LAWRENCE! YOU SHOULD HAVE SLAPPED HER, CLARA!
ME--?

YOU'RE THE ONE WHO'S BEEN SLEEPING WITH MY LAWRENCE, BEHIND MY BACK! HE ASKED ME FOR A DIVORCE! HE WAS GOING TO TELL JOHN!
JOHN WOULD HAVE KILLED US BOTH...

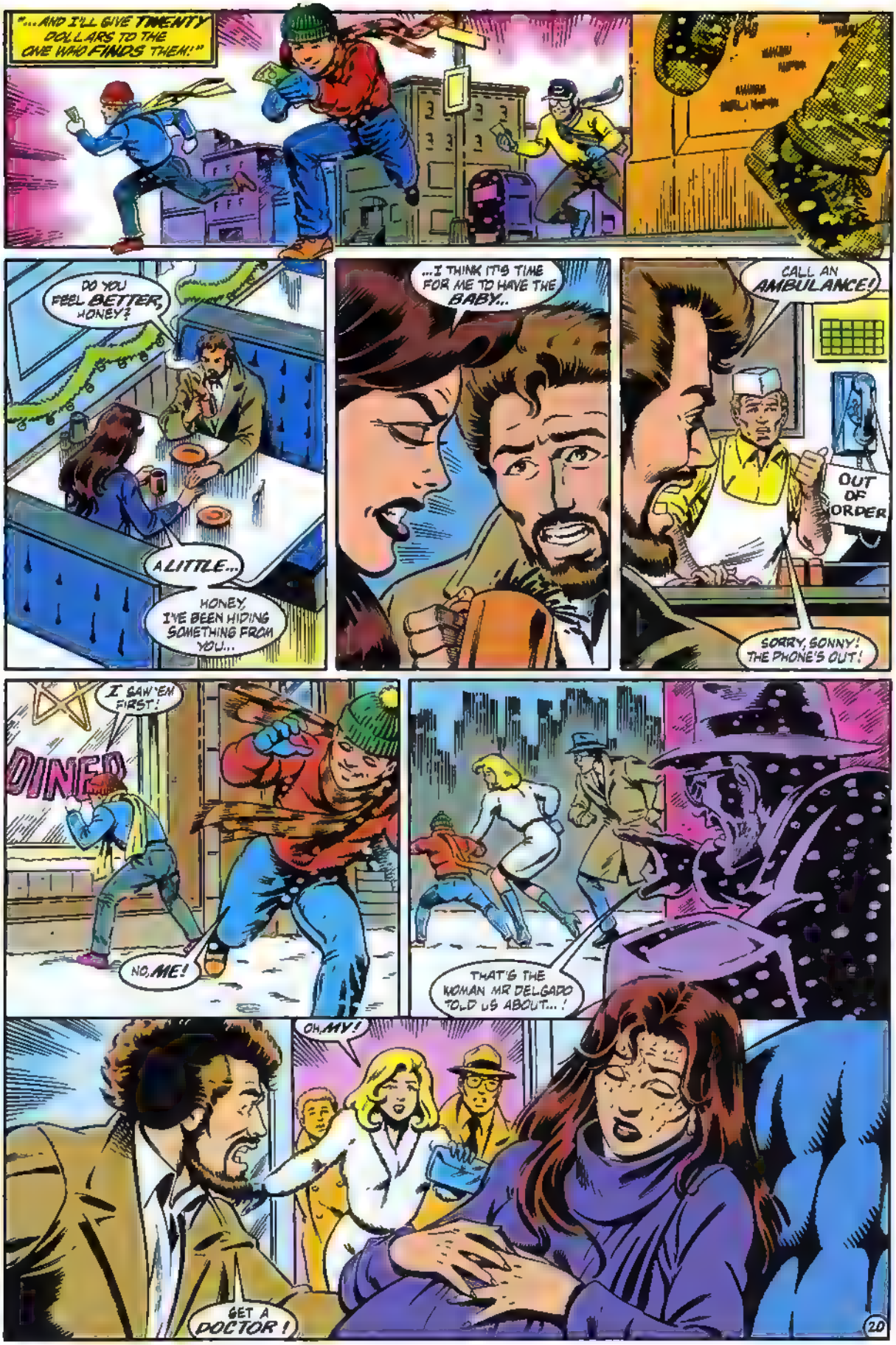

...BUT YOU'RE NO ANGEL, CLARA; YOU'LL DO PRETTY WELL FOR YOURSELF BY LAWRENCE'S WILL! NOW YOU'LL FINALLY BE ABLE TO LEAVE US, AND GO BACK TO YOUR FANCY FRIENDS IN NEW ENGLAND!
YOU SHUT UP ABOUT MY MOTHER...!


WHY? YOU'LL MAKE OUT LIKE A BANDIT, TOO, IF YOUR OLD MAN DIES!
AND YOU WON'T?

IF LAWRENCE DIES, YOU'LL BECOME JOHN'S LIEUTENANT! YOU COULDN'T EARN THE POSITION MAYBE YOU DECIDED TO KILL FOR IT!
LOOKS LIKE WE ALL GET A CHRISTMAS PRESENT IF UNCLE LAWRENCE CROAKS, EH?

WHAT'S ALL THE NOISE OUT HERE?
WE WERE JUST REMINISCING ABOUT LAWRENCE, DARLING—I GUESS WE GOT A LITTLE LOUD.
DAMN HOTEL! YOU'D THINK THEY'D'VE TAKEN US IN ON CHRISTMAS EVE...!
DADDY CANCELLED ALL OUR CREDIT CARDS, GARY.
I'M TELLING YOU, GO BACK TO HIM, ROSA! HE WON'T HURT YOU!
CAN'T YOU UNDERSTAND ENGLISH? NO.
I'M NOT A DELGADO ANYMORE—I'M A CRANDELL NOW.
SO'S OUR BABY.
...NO, WE'VE HAD NO COUPLES ANSWERING THAT DESCRIPTION IN HERE TODAY.
THANK YOU ANYWAY, SISTER..
...PLEASE TAKE THIS TO CONTINUE YOUR GOOD WORK.
WELL, GOD BLESS YOU! IT'S WONDERFUL TO KNOW THE CHRISTMAS SPIRIT HASN'T BEEN FORGOTTEN!
GOLDEN TO MISSION
"NO, WE HAVEN'T SEEN ANYONE LIKE THAT, MISS MAYS..."

...BUT SOME OTHER MEN CAME BY, ASKING US THE SAME QUESTION--THEY GAVE US A SIZEABLE DONATION.
I SEE. THANK YOU VERY MUCH, REVEREND.
I'VE BEEN WASTING OUR TIME, LOOKING IN MISSIONS. THAT'S TOO OBVIOUS, AND TOO DANGEROUS FOR ANYONE ELSE AROUND...
WE'VE RULED OUT HOTELS AND MISSIONS, MISS MAYS--WHAT ELSE IS THERE?
THERE ARE RESTAURANTS, SANDY--BUT THERE ARE DOZENS OF THEM IN THIS NEIGHBORHOOD.
WE NEED SOME HELP--AND I THINK I KNOW WHO.
STOP
YOU'VE GOT TO GET OUT OF THE COLD, HONEY.
OKAY...
EATS
STAR
DINER
THERE. WE CAN GO THERE...
WELL, HELLO THERE--I BET YOU'D ALL LIKE TEN DOLLARS TO SPEND ON TOYS, WOULDN'T YOU?
MY MOMMA TOLD ME NOT TO TALK TO NO STRANGERS, LADY!
YOU DON'T HAVE TO DO ANYTHING BUT LOOK FOR SOMEONE' YOU'LL EACH GET TEN DOLLARS RIGHT NOW...
19


"...AND I'LL GIVE TWENTY DOLLARS TO THE ONE WHO FINDS THEM!"
DO YOU FEEL BETTER, HONEY?
A LITTLE...
HONEY, I'VE BEEN HIDING SOMETHING FROM YOU...
...I THINK IT'S TIME FOR ME TO HAVE THE BABY...
CALL AN AMBULANCE!
OUT OF ORDER
SORRY, SONNY! THE PHONE'S OUT!
I SAW 'EM FIRST!
DINER
NO, ME!
THAT'S THE WOMAN MR DELGADO TOLD US ABOUT...!
OH, MY!
GET A DOCTOR!

YOU'RE ROSA, AREN'T YOU? I'M JENNIFER, IT WILL BE ALL RIGHT.
GET ME SOME CLEAN TOWELS AND HOT WATER--NOW!
?
AAAUGGGHH--!
A DEEP BREATH NOW, ROSA! YOU CAN DO IT...!
YOU'RE DOING FINE, HONEY!
"ROSA--!
WAHHHH
IT'S NOT ENOUGH YOU TRY TO KILL MY BROTHER? YOU ALSO ENDANGER MY LITTLE GIRL?
I DIDN'T--
21

AND DID YOUR SON-IN-LAW ALSO SHOOT UP THAT HOSPITAL ROOM, MR. DELGADO?
HEY, EASY WITH THE GUNS, GUYS!
THAT WAS CRAZY! IT'S GOT NOTHING TO DO WITH THIS!
IT'S GOT EVERYTHING TO DO WITH THIS! REMEMBER, THE BULLETS CAME FROM THE SAME GUN THAT SHOT YOUR BROTHER!
WHY? IT'S STUPID TO SHOOT UP AN EMPTY ROOM!
THE WOULD-BE KILLER DIDN'T KNOW IT WAS EMPTY! HE-- OR SHE THOUGHT YOUR BROTHER WAS IN IT.
NO! THE ROOM IN THE RED WING WAS SHOT UP! JOHN WAS IN THE GREEN WING!
BECAUSE THE KILLER COULDN'T TELL THEM APART! THE ROOM NUMBERS WERE THE SAME, ONLY THEIR COLORS WERE DIFFERENT!
AN OBVIOUS DIFFERENCE? NOT TO THE KILLER! HE--OR SHE-- IS COLOR-BLIND!
COLOR-BLIND?
COLOR-BLIND! THE KILLER CAN'T DISTINGUISH BETWEEN RED AND GREEN! IT'S CALLED PROTANOPIA; THE VICTIM CAN OFTEN CONCEAL IT. BUT--
GABE, NOT NOW!
ANYWAY, THE WOULD-BE KILLER WANTED YOU TO THINK GARY TRIED TO KILL YOUR BROTHER--BUT HIS... OR HER... COLOR BLINDNESS GAVE HIM AWAY!
HOW? HOW CAN YOU KNOW WHO'S COLOR-BLIND AND WHO'S NOT?
OVER HERE...
"CLARA DELGADO NAVIGATED THE COLOR-CODED HALLS EASILY. SHE ISN'T COLOR-BLIND, AND NEITHER IS YOUR NIECE, JUDY. SHE WAS WEARING A COLOR-COORDINATED OUTFIT OF RED AND GREEN.
22

"YOUR WIFE ISN'T COLOR-BLIND; SHE THREATENED TO BLACKEN JENNIFER'S GREEN EYES...
BEEP
BEEP
BEEP
"...BUT YOUR SON TONY--HE HONKED AT US WHEN WE WERE STOPPED AT A RED LIGHT! IN HIS NERVOUSNESS OVER BOTCHING YOUR BROTHER'S DEATH, HE FORGOT THE GREEN TRAFFIC LIGHT IS IN THE BOTTOM POSITION!"
TONY! IS THIS TRUE?
YOU CAN'T BELIEVE HIM, FATHER. HIS WORD AGAINST MINE?
ASK YOUR SON TO TELL YOU WHICH OF THESE ORNAMENTS IS RED, MR. DELGADO...
...WELL, TONY?
HAVE THE POLICE TAKE YOU TO MANHATTAN GENERAL, ROSA! I'VE GOT PULL THERE! I'LL COME AND VISIT YOU LATER TONIGHT.
SURE, PAPA.. COME VISIT ME AND LITTLE JOHN.
AND YOU--YOU'VE GOT SOME FAST TALKING TO DO, ANTHONY!
FATHER I SWEAR...!
MISS MAYS! IS EVERYTHING ALL RIGHT?
MOTHER, FATHER AND SON ARE ALL DOING FINE.

I'M GLAD YOU CAME TO MIDNIGHT MASS WITH ME.
I'M GLAD YOU ASKED ME. I DIDN'T KNOW YOU WERE CATHOLIC.
I DON'T KNOW IF I AM, ANYMORE... BUT I'VE ALWAYS LIKED THE CEREMONY AND WHAT IT STANDS FOR
SURE.
WOULD YOU LIKE TO COME IN? I'M GOING TO MAKE HOT CHOCOLATE.
WITH THOSE LITTLE MARSHMALLOWS?
IF YOU LIKE.
IN ALL THE GOINGS-ON, I THINK YOU FORGOT ABOUT THIS.
MY MATCH--!
THERE'S BEEN A LITTLE SOMETHING ADDED THIS TIME.
WHAT'S THIS ON THE BACK--?
To Babe, 12-25-89
I love you. Always, Jennifer

from the desk of
Jennifer Mays

MAZE AGENTS

c/o Innovation Publishing, 3622 Jacob Street, Wheeling, WV 26003

*One of the nicest things about being away is coming back. And as proof, let's dig into the mail on **THE MAZE AGENCY #8**, the first issue published by the good folks here at Innovation.*

Dear Mike,

How does it feel to be back? From this end, it's wonderful.

THE MAZE AGENCY #8 came through like a welcome breath of fresh air. I've missed reading this title, one of the few not filled with ghastly garbed figures defying our common logic with their unearthly exploits. No, it's nice to cuddle up by the fire with a good mystery.

While the idea of the protagonist being framed for murder has been seen to abundance in every genre, issue #8's exploits kept things entertaining. Whodunit? What was the significance of the footprints in the carpet? Was it suicide? The fun part about these mysteries is that the reader can play along, involving himself in the story to a great degree.

Gabe and Jennifer's relationship is progressing quickly. Perhaps too quickly? Forgive me, but memories of *Moonlighting*'s crash-and-burn love story are still fresh in mind. How far can this duo grow? I know -- wait and see.

Last, I enjoyed the pin-up centerfold page; it's a nice addition to a fine package

See you next month!

Mahalo,
Mark Lucas
1100 Granville #2
Los Angeles, CA 90049

*Inker Rick Magyar would like to thank the following for their art assistance on recent issues: Sherry Rose (ladies first) and, following in alphabetical order, That Old Gang of Mine **Dave Billman, Dennis Earlenbaugh, and Steve Trenjan***

Rubber Babies rule!

Dear Editor,

Innovation and Mr. Campiti have earned my respect. I, too, share Mr. Campiti's assessment of ***THE MAZE AGENCY***: it is "well-written, well-designed, and well-drawn."

Rarely has a title achieved such beauty and intelligence. ***THE MAZE AGENCY*** has a perfect combination of storytelling and illustration thanks to the creative genuis of Mike W. Barr, Adam Hughes, and Rick Magyar. Thank you for allowing this monthly masterpiece to continue.

Having Jennifer finally seeing Gabriel's apartment was the highlight of issue eight. Somehow, between all of the amusing distractions (Ms. Jazmecki's "welcoming" of Jennifer, for example) and less than ideal living quarters, Jen's love for Gabe is accentuated like never before.

The pin-up was a pleasant surprise. I hope that this will not be the last to appear.

I have wanted to express my delight in ***THE MAZE AGENCY*** since the first issue, and now I am doing so. I want Jennifer Mays and Gabriel Webb to have a home at Innovation for a very, long time.

Thanks again for publishing this excellent comic book.

Sincerely,
Daniel J. Wooten
121 Water Street
Ellettsville, IN 47429

I guess that's the textbook definition of a symbiotic relationship, Daniel -- you like reading the book, I like writing it, Robb and Rick like drawing and inking it, and Innovation likes publishing it. Let's see if we can keep this going for, say, another fifty years or so, okay?

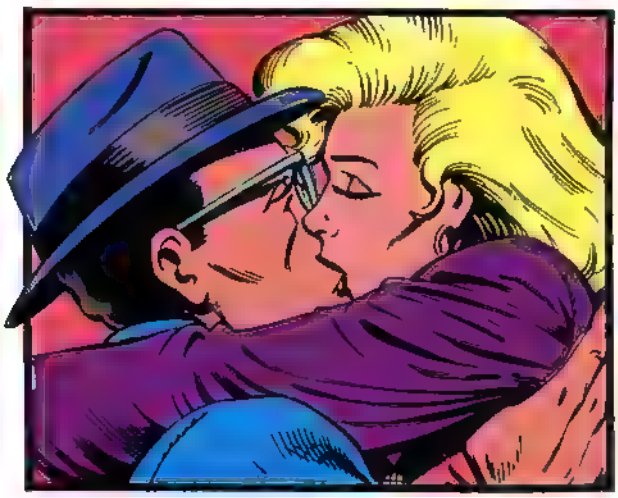
Dear Mike,

What a miraculous surprise. Gabe is back, and Innovation has him. (Okay, I realize that most fans are probably cheering the return of Jennifer -- and who can blame them, the way Adam and Rick draw her?)

I was so disappointed when I read that ***THE MAZE AGENCY*** was being cancelled. I hate to sound like a broken record, but this kind of thing happens too often. It seems that any book that does not fit the mold is left to wither and die in today's very competitive market. It is nice to see this is not always the case.

I do enjoy your publication. The stories are always entertaining. Mike, you're not the only fan of the novels of Ellery Queen. I discovered their writing through the NBC TV show and have been a fan ever since. My wait for the issue featuring Ellery will be a long one.

Unlike most of your readers, I do not enjoy playing amateur detective. I read the sorty and let Gabe and Jennifer figure out who did it. I am a believer in true love, so let's keep the romance alice between Gabe and Jennifer.



Here's hoping that ***THE MAZE AGENCY*** is in business for a long time.

Jesse W. Jackson
3705 William Dehaes #2502
Irving, TX 75038

*Maybe the biggest mystery in any issue of **MAZE** is what's going to happen between Gabe and Jennifer. What did you think of the end of this issue, J.W.J.?*

*And don't forget **MAZE BOOK: THE MAZE AGENCY COLLECTION #1**, on sale now! It reprints the first four issues of the series, with spot illustrations and the first full printing of a **MAZE** short story by **Adam Hughes** and **Rick Magyar**! It's $10.95, where you bought this issue! If your dealer doesn't have it, chastise him (gently!), then ask him to order it.*

*If for some reason he can't -- or won't -- carry it or order it for you, send $10.95 plus $2.00 shipping to Innovation, Subscription Department, 3622 Jacob Street, Wheeling, WV 26003, to get one right from the publisher. Back issues of **THE MAZE AGENCY** issues **#8, #9, #10,** and even continuing subscriptions, are available for $2.50 per issue, including postage.*

Hope this helps!

Dear Mike (Barr, that is):

You know, if you made the clues any easier to spot, I think that I might be able to figure out the killer or suspect everytime. This issue (**#8**, "A New Lease on Death"), for example, was very easy -- yet it wasn't -- to solve.

I was thrown off by the clues that led to Mr. Connors (I really liked the round frame to point that out to people), but at the end of the book the triangularly-folded drop cloth was what made me realize the killer's identity.

I realize that this is easy to say since I am writing to you after the book has been read, but true it is. Anyway, now that that is out of the way, I can tell you that I really enjoyed this issue. More so, I think, than previous issues. It seemed to be that much better direction-wise, character-wise, and clue-wise. And I liked the way that you are making the relationship between Jen and Gave heat up, yet still stay at a coolish pace.

Boy, was it ever nice to see Adam Hughes back on the art chores of this book! Is this going to be the only issue he is going to do for a while, or will ge be back every few issues? As usual, he and Rick just did a fantastic job. Everything was just so beautifully done that you couldn't help but like the artwork in the book.

Well, thank you -- Mike, Adam, Rick, and everybody else -- for bringing back one of my all-time favorite books.

See you next issue.

Galen S. West
Ponderosa Hall #23A
Fresno State University
Fresno, CA 93710

Dear Editor,

Re: ***THE MAZE AGENCY #8***

First of all, it's great to see this book back on the racks. It was a favorite of mine when Comico published it, and it still is, now that it carries the Innovation banner.

As for this issue, well, Mike and Adam and Rick picked up right where the series left off when Comico gave it up -- excellent scripts and fabulous artwork. I just can't get enough of it. To be honest with you, I had Edwards pegged early, but nearly fell for the red herrings. Good, solid script as always, Mike.

Report card: It's obvious -- a perfect 10!

So when are Jen and Gabe getting married? Later, pardners...

Jacob Gilbert
Troy, New York

NEXT ISSUE: *Original series penciller **Adam Hughes** returns for one issue as Jennifer is hired by a reclusive billionaire to locate the stolen death mask of a beautiful woman.*

*But one of the suspect's faces hides a killer, and it's up to **THE MAZE AGENCY** to unmask him!*

*"Murderer's Mask" is inked by **Rick Magyar** and is written by yours truly --*

-- Mike W. Barr
December, 1989

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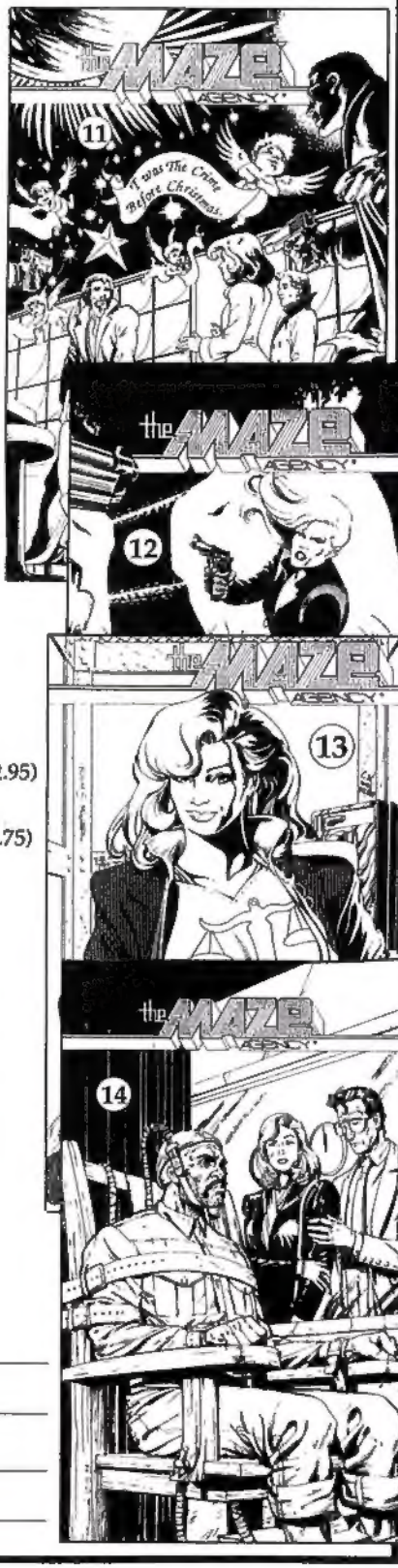

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LAST ISSUE: Gabe met Jennifer's parents on the eve of their 40th wedding anniversary. And if things weren't tense enough, one of the guests was trying to kill Jennifer's father!

THIS ISSUE: In "'Twas The Crime Before Christmas," a pregnant woman and her husband are wandering the streets of a major city, sought by two groups of people. It sounds like O. Henry's story "Gift of the Magi" all over again, but the city is modern-day New York; the mother and father are mob informants; and the wise men and shepherds are mob gunman, Jennifer, and Gabe!

...Not A Creature Was Stirring...